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## The Constitution

The Swedish Constitution defines how the country shall be governed. It contains provisions on the relationship between decision-making and executive power and the basic rights and freedoms of citizens.

Sweden has four fundamental laws which together make up the Constitution: the Instrument of Government, the Act of Succession, the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression.

[The Constitution of Sweden on The Riksdag website](#)

## Instrument of Government

The Instrument of Government contains the basic principles of Sweden's form of government: how the Government is to work, the fundamental freedoms and rights of the Swedish people and how elections to the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) are to be implemented. The adoption in 1974 of the Instrument of Government currently in force meant a considerable reduction in the powers of the monarchy. The King remained Head of State but with no political power whatsoever, while the Speaker of the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) was given the task of appointing the new prime minister in connection with changes of government.

## Act of Succession

It is laid down in the Instrument of Government that Sweden shall have a King or Queen as Head of State, but the Act of Succession enacted in 1810 regulates who is to inherit the throne. Until 1979 succession to the throne of Sweden was through the male blood line. Then the Riksdag decided that a woman could also inherit the throne.

## Freedom of the Press Act

The most recent Freedom of the Press Act was adopted in 1949 although Sweden established freedom of the press by law as early as 1766 and was first in the world to do so. Freedom of the press means the right to disseminate information in printed form but with accountability before the law. Another feature of the Freedom of the Press Act is citizens right to study public documents, the principle of public access to official documents.

## Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression

The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression was adopted in 1991 and is Swedens youngest fundamental law. Like the Freedom of the Press Act it contains provisions on free dissemination of information and prohibits censorship. It covers new media such as radio, TV, films and CD-ROM discs.

Fundamental laws are more difficult to amend than other laws. They may only be amended or abolished if two Riksdags have adopted identically formulated decisions, with an election intervening. No other laws or ordinances may conflict with the fundamental laws.

## Riksdag Act

In addition to the fundamental laws, there is the Riksdag Act which holds a special status between fundamental law and ordinary law. To amend this Act only one Riksdag decision is required but it must be adopted by a qualified majority (at least three quarters of votes and the support of more than half the members). The Riksdag Act contains detailed provisions on the Riksdag and its workings.

## EU and the fundamental laws

As a member of the European Union, Sweden is also covered by the EU *acquis communautaire*, which means that laws jointly enacted in the EU usually take precedence over members national laws. On joining the EU Sweden was therefore obliged to make a few minor adjustments to the fundamental laws. Among other things, the Freedom of the Press Act was amended to enable the prohibition of advertisements for breast milk substitutes.

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